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State braces for possible ice jams

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Officials are watching sections of area rivers for ice jams and flooding as precipitation has again made its way into the forecast.

The National Weather Service is forecasting a system tonight and Friday to bring rain, and eventually snow. That comes after temperatures have risen the last few days to allow snow and ice melting.

A modest amount of rain today could aid in steady melting, said Steve Oltmans, manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

But more than a half-inch could help cause large pieces of ice to break up and jam downstream. Snowmelt would build up behind the ice dams, eventually spilling over banks.

The Loup, Elkhorn and Platte Rivers have the greatest potential for ice jams.

The state is considering dusting ash to encourage melting.

Officials met with the Army Corps of Engineers on Wednesday to evaluate whether and where the ash may be needed, said Cindy Newsham, response and recovery section manager with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency.

A decision would most likely be made over the weekend depending on the latest system and the opinion from the corps.

Should ice jams become a problem, options like using dynamite to break the jams are available. But for now, everyone is waiting on the weather and studying the problem.

"At this point, we don't see a need to panic," Oltmans said.

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